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Ph: 0481-2573234

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His Holiness Writes...

Beloved in Christ,

The world in which we live today is burdened by many trials that deeply affect human life and challenge the very foundations of peaceful coexistence. Wars and armed conflicts continue to devastate nations, robbing countless families of their homes, security, and hope. The suffering of innocent people reminds us that humanity still struggles to uphold the sanctity of life and the dignity bestowed upon every person by God.

At the same time, communal and religious conflicts have become a painful reality in many parts of the world. Instead of celebrating our diversity as a gift from God, humanity often allows intolerance, suspicion and division to prevail. Underlying many of these crises is the selfish tendency of human nature—a growing preoccupation with personal gain, power and self-interest that weakens our sense of responsibility towards one another. In the midst of these adversities, we are called to respond not with fear, anger or indifference, but with faith, compassion and unwavering hope. Our Lord Jesus Christ has taught us that we are to be peacemakers, for "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God." Our response to a broken world must therefore be rooted in prayer, forgiveness, service and a sincere commitment to building communities of peace and mutual respect.

It is in this context that the Holy Soonoyo Lent, observed from the first to the fifteenth of August in connection with the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, becomes profoundly relevant for our spiritual journey. The Holy Mother of God stands before us as a perfect example of humility, obedience and complete surrender to the will of God. Her life was not marked by worldly power or self-promotion, but by silent faithfulness and selfless service. She accepted God's divine purpose with courage and entrusted her entire life to His providence.

Soonoyo Lent invites us to imitate these virtues. Through prayer, fasting and

self-denial, we are called to confront the selfishness that often dominates our hearts and to cultivate a spirit of generosity and love. Fasting is not merely an abstention from food; it is a discipline that teaches us to restrain our desires, purify our thoughts and redirect our lives toward God and our fellow human beings. This holy season also reminds us that authentic Christian witness extends beyond the walls of the Church. In a world divided by conflict, Christians must become instruments of reconciliation. In societies wounded by communal tensions, we must become builders of harmony and understanding. In an age of growing self-centeredness, we are called to practice sacrificial love and compassionate service.

The Blessed Virgin Mary teaches us that true greatness lies not in asserting ourselves over others, but in offering ourselves for the good of others. Her life bears witness to the truth that humility is stronger than pride, love is greater than hatred, and faith ultimately triumphs over despair. As we observe the Soonoyo Lent, let every family become a place of prayer, every parish a centre of service, and every believer a messenger of peace. Let us pray for those who suffer because of wars and violence, for those affected by hatred and discrimination, and for all who strive to uphold justice and human dignity.

May this holy season renew our hearts and strengthen our resolve to live as faithful Disciples of Christ. Through the intercessions of the Blessed Virgin Mary, may God grant peace to the nations, harmony among communities and compassion within every human heart.

With prayers and blessings,

Baselios Marthoma Mathews III

Editorial

While enjoying the excitement and celebration of the World Cup, can we have a spiritual meditation on it? Such a reflection does seem both possible and relevant when we remember our divine Guru, who, in his teachings, revealed profound truths through symbols of the ordinary realities of life—bread, farming, fishing, vineyard, sycamore tree, seed and sowing.

One of FIFA's main objectives is to unite the world through football. World Cup Football has thus become a common language that brings humanity together, connecting people from diverse backgrounds across linguistic, cultural, and geographical divides. The whole world is celebrating the joy of fellowship through the grand festival of the 2026 World Cup, in which 48 teams are participating in a spirit of competition, mutual respect, unity and shared celebration.

Just as a man's eyes, ears, hands, and feet all work in perfect harmony, so the members of a team work together in wonderful coordination to achieve victory. Do not most teams show us that inner harmony is essential for the success of any family, parish, or organization? The goalkeeper, the defenders, and the strikers, who perform different roles, all work in unison. This powerful vision of unity is crucial for success in every social sphere, from the family level to the workplace. If Ronaldo does not pass the ball and tries to score only for himself, the Portugal team may fail. In this vision of harmony, each and every individual and community is important. Congo's draw with the mighty Portugal and Cape Verde's draw with strong Spain underline this insight: that it is not advisable to underestimate anyone.

When we see the referee running with the players, it seems to remind us of our conscience. When the rules and values of the World Cup are violated, the referee, who runs on the ground with the players, controls and takes action. In the same way, our conscience is like the referee, who journeys with us throughout our life, intervening when necessary. One difference is that in football, if the referee's intervention is irrevocably strong and decisive, the voice of our conscience is only a gentle reminder. Those who continue to ignore that soft mantra and abuse human freedom, are more likely to "kick the referee out" and fail in life. Strengthening human conscience through repentance, prayer, gospel values, and the Holy Spirit can be considered a blessing.

The vigilance of each player is truly wonderful. The zeal and alertness to intercept, pass and score goals against the opponents who come swiftly to capture the ball are remarkable. It is worth trying to learn

from football, a style of constant vigilance to protect faith, love, integrity, and hope.

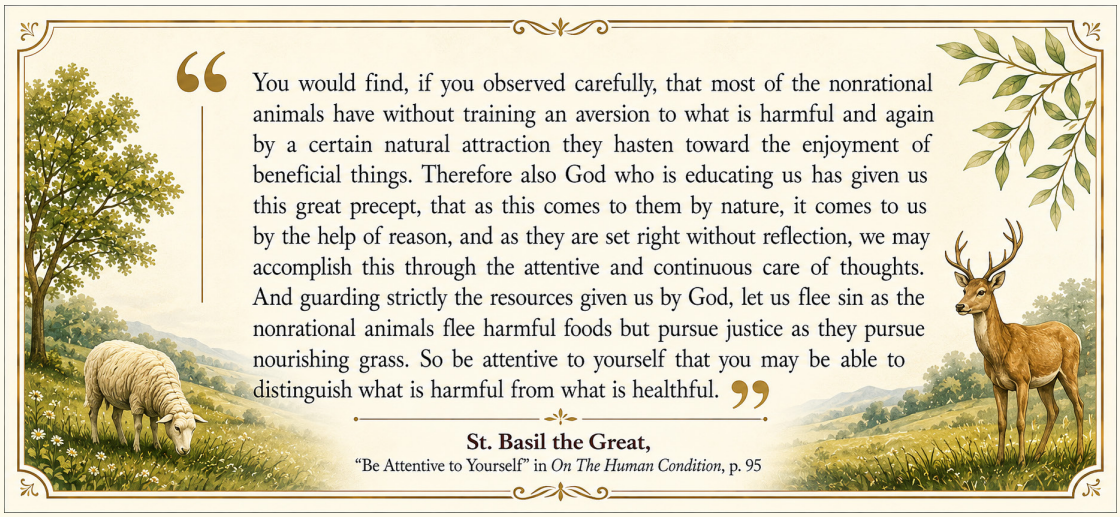
There is a lot to learn from each player. Some legends, including those of football, indirectly remind us not to imitate them in certain things, while also shedding light on many positive aspects of life. This may draw our attention to people like Maradona. Lionel Messi, one of the world's greatest footballers and top goal scorers, teaches us many lessons, including perseverance and survival. This Argentinian's humility, faith, commitment to his family, and sacrificial love expressed through giving a significant part of his wealth to charity, are all worth mentioning.

Although the serious growth hormone deficiency that affected Messi from the age of ten was diagnosed, the cost of its treatment was more than what his middle-class family could afford. At the age of thirteen, Football Club Barcelona stepped in to pay for Messi's treatment under certain conditions.

Accordingly, he made a huge sacrifice at a young age by leaving his home to join F.C. Barcelona and eventually move to Spain. Although his dedication, preparation, training, and talent all came together to lead him to the top of world football, he was sometimes shaken by many failures and criticism. Argentina's loss to Germany in the 2014 World Cup final and the Copa America final defeat in 2016, exhausted him. Messi announced his retirement from international football in 2016. Later he changed his mind and continued to contribute tremendously, leading football to glorious heights. People like Messi, who have overcome negative experiences and thoughts and achieved remarkable success, inspire us.

Divine wisdom illuminates the path of endurance, sacrifice, and triumph, leading to life's crowning glory, just as in sports (James 1:12; 1 Corinthians 9:24-27). The ultimate lesson and power for survival come not from Messi but from the Messiah. Let us enjoy the World Cup well, and along with it appreciate the valuable insights that football offers us.

Bijesh Philip Achen
Editor, Malankara Sabha English Quarterly


"You would find, if you observed carefully, that most of the nonrational animals have without training an aversion to what is harmful and again by a certain natural attraction they hasten toward the enjoyment of beneficial things. Therefore also God who is educating us has given us this great precept, that as this comes to them by nature, it comes to us by the help of reason, and as they are set right without reflection, we may accomplish this through the attentive and continuous care of thoughts. And guarding strictly the resources given us by God, let us flee sin as the nonrational animals flee harmful foods but pursue justice as they pursue nourishing grass. So be attentive to yourself that you may be able to distinguish what is harmful from what is healthful."
St. Basil the Great,
"Be Attentive to Yourself" in *On The Human Condition*, p. 95

THE PROPHETIC ZEAL OF THE "HOLY FOOLS"

Dr. K. L. Mathew Vaidyan Cor Episcopa

Editor's Note: Within the spiritual tradition of the Orthodox Church, we encounter a unique group of ascetics known as the "Holy Fools" (Fools for Christ). Their hidden lives of prayer, humility and radical christian discipleship became a powerful witness to the world. Though often misunderstood by society, they embraced a life of self-denial and complete surrender to Christ, becoming "fools" in the eyes of the world but wise in the mystery of God. Their saintly lives became a source of inspiration, reverence and spiritual reflection for the faithful.

The alarming rate at which the younger generation is drifting away from the church is becoming a major challenge. The many reasons for such behaviour are attributed to: a perceived 'lack of prophetic spirit' in an organised religion, discontent with the working patterns of the church; a growing attraction to more emotional or dynamic forms of worship; clashes of cultures; failure to understand the liturgical tradition of the Church; lack of a vibrant youth ministry; the negative impact of church politics and litigations associated with the church, and disenchantment because of the hypocrisy and negative witness of some leaders.

Various pastoral approaches have been proposed to seek and restore the lost sheep, including:

- Making the church a place of spiritual refuge, comfort and safety.

- Nurturing young people and keeping them connected to the faith and traditions of the Church through regular personal contact. Our presence and witness should be meaningful, encouraging, and capable of touching the hearts of young people.
- Maintaining a vibrant Youth Ministry
- Strengthening a personal relationship with Christ and fulfil social obligations.
- Help them develop skills and creativity
- Ensure the availability of adequate literature, materials, and resources for catechetical instructions on spiritual growth, discipleship and Christian formation.
- Above all, help them become familiar with the inspiring lives of saints, martyrs and witnesses of the church.

Having said this, let us turn our attention to the stories of certain saints in church history, whose journeys of faith and witness, bravery and sacrificial love, continue to inspire young minds and speak powerfully to them.

In the spiritual tradition of the Orthodox Church we see solitary ascetics who embrace lives of solitude and strict spiritual discipline to grow closer to God through prayer and detachment from worldly concerns. Their devoted and saintly lives become a source of inspiration and reverence. In a broader spiritual sense, they were regarded as fools for the Lord Jesus Christ. These ascetics lived in the Russian Orthodox and the Greek Orthodox traditions at different periods of time.

The relics of St. Nikolai (who died on 28 February 1576) are kept at the Trinity Cathedral of the Russian Orthodox church in Pskov. When the author of this article visited the church in 1977, he read the inscription on the shrine written in the Russian language. The English translation of the inscription is as follows:

" He was a holy fool in his life. He was a citizen of the heavenly Jerusalem. He transformed the power and the wild thoughts of the Tsar to mercy and meekness."

The "holy fools" pointed out the faults of eminent people about whom others dare not speak. These 'holy fools' were blessed with spiritual gifts as a result of lifelong ascetic practices. The common people held these saints in high veneration. A disciple of St. Nikolai, named Nikander, has written about the miracles that occurred through his master. St. Nikolai wandered in the forested areas for 35 years as a beggar, observing all the Lents and fasting discipline of the church. Through his deep spiritual practices, he was blessed with the gifts of foreseeing future events in the lives of the people and the country.

Another story about St. Nikolai is as follows: Emperor Ivan IV (16th century), after capturing the city of Novgorod, moved to Pskov. As per the Russian custom, the people of Pskov, honoured the Tsar by receiving him with bread and salt as a sign of hospitality. At that time, Nikolai arrived there wearing old, torn clothes. He turned to the Tsar and uttered these strong words boldly: "Ivan, Ivan, eat our bread and salt, and not our Christian blood. " It was a bold appeal to the king to stop killing innocent people through war and bloodshed. The angry Tsar ordered the soldiers to kill Nikolai. But they could not kill this saint immediately. Soon the Tsar was forced to retreat as the soldiers and horses began to fight among themselves.

Vladimir Lossky, in his book 'The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church' points out the life of simplicity, solitude and strong ascetic practices among the holy fools. He writes: "The holy fool does ridiculous things in order to hide his spiritual gifts from the gaze of those around him beneath the mask of repulsive madness,

or rather to break with this world in the most profound and, for the faculty of reason, the most unacceptable sense, by freeing himself from the constrains of his social ego".

Actually, the holy fools are not fools in the ordinary sense, but people of deep spiritual wisdom. They are men and women of prayer who do not wish to display their prayer life or to take credit with the motive of receiving praise and recognition from others. They are deeply committed to observe lent, fasting and other spiritual disciplines. They pour blessed tears day and night in repentance and prayer. Sometimes they speak like lunatics pronouncing "ineffable words" (2 Corinthians12:4) so that others may regard them as fools.

They have completely renounced all worldly pleasures. They are content with one or two pieces of old clothing and do not worry about what they will eat in the coming days. During their wanderings they may get one or two pieces of bread. They are fully satisfied with that, like St. John the Baptist who lived in the wilderness, eating locusts and wild honey. They sleep in the streets or in the porches of churches. They walk barefoot on thick snow.

The holy fools were deeply aware of the mortality of this world and sought to avoid "pride and prejudice". Scholars who have studied the lives of the "holy fools" have recorded that the saints received special gifts of the Holy Spirit and the power to foresee future events. People loved and respected these ascetics. But the rulers and authorities were afraid of them.

They entered both humble huts and royal castles proclaiming the justice of God. They vehemently criticized evil rulers and unjust feudal authorities. As a result, they were persecuted and many of them were brutally killed. They manifested the love, patience and endurance of the Cross. The historical narratives of the Russian holy fools, such as St. Basil the Blessed (Vasilee), St. Xenia of Saint Petersburg, St. John (Iovan) of Moscow, St. Nikolai Salos of Pskov and others, reveal them as spiritually strong models of courage, faith, and sanctity.

Some rulers who respected the holy fools invited them to their palaces in order to hear their words of true wisdom. St. Iovan, the holy fool, used to walk through the streets of Moscow, boldly announcing the cruelties of the king. Since he wore a very old and torn cap, he became known in history as Iovan the Great-Cap.

The holy fools often warned of the destruction that would follow under cruel rulers. They fulfilled their prophetic role within the political and social realities of their time. Even in the present religious and social context, they continue to inspire reflection on justice, repentance, and the call to speak the truth. These saintly people feared no one except God Almighty. They devoted themselves to a life of incessant prayer, intercession, fasting, and spiritual struggle.

Today, the young people of the Church seek genuine role models. They are capable of distinguishing the 'holy fools' from the foolish people who live with false pride, ego, selfishness and a mania for publicity. They recognize, reject, and condemn parasites who become a burden to society. The "holy fool" is the one who lives in Christ, fights for justice, preserves sanctity, spreads the Gospel and manifests true sacrificial love. The history of the "holy fools" persuades us to face the challenge of continuing this prophetic mission in the modern world.

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(Very Rev. Dr. K. L. Mathew Vaidyan Cor Episcopa is the Principal of St. Paul's Mission Training Center, Mavelikara, and the Director of Theobhavan Counselling Center, Mavelikara. He formerly served as a Lecturer at the Orthodox Theological Seminary, Kottayam.)

MOTHER OF THE LIGHT:
AN ICONOGRAPHIC MEDITATION ON THE MYSTERY OF THE INCARNATION

Fr. Rijo Geevarghese

Sacred art in the Christian tradition is never merely illustrative. An icon does not simply represent religious realities; rather, it participates in the Church's proclamation of the mystery of salvation. Sacred images, Icons, church paintings and other forms of ecclesial art, are meant to confess the reality of the Incarnation: because the Word truly became flesh, He may be depicted in matter, and matter itself becomes a bearer of divine grace[1]

The present painting, Mother of the Light, (Syriac: *Emme d-Nuhro*), is an iconographic meditation on the mystery of the Incarnation through the convergence of Eastern Christian theology and Indian visual symbolism. It seeks to contemplate the eternal Word who "became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1:14), and the Virgin Mary who, became the living sanctuary of the Uncontainable God.

At the center of the composition stands

St Mary, serene and contemplative, clothed in darkness yet enveloped by radiance. Her downward gaze signifies humility, receptivity, and interior contemplation. It recalls the moment of Annunciation: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38). In the tradition of the Church, Mother Mary is not merely the biological mother of Jesus but the *Theotokos*—the God-bearer—whose womb became "more spacious than the heavens" because it contained Him whom the universe cannot contain.

Within her womb appears Christ as light, symbolized through a *diya* (*deepak*), the traditional Indian oil lamp. This artistic choice is deliberate and theological. Across Indian religious and cultural traditions, the lamp signifies knowledge, life, purity, and the victory of light over darkness. By employing this indigenous symbol, the painting seeks to proclaim in an Indian idiom the Christian confession that Christ is "the true Light that enlightens everyone" (Jn 1:9) and "the Light of the world" (Jn 8:12).

The lamp, however, is not merely a cultural adaptation. It becomes a Christological symbol. Just as the burning bush held the divine fire without being consumed (Ex 3:2), so Mary bore within herself the divine Word while remaining ever Virgin. The Syriac Fathers repeatedly contemplated this paradox of fire dwelling in matter. St Ephrem the Syrian writes:

"The Fire entered the womb of the Virgin and became flesh."

Theologically, the flame within Mary is not merely an object she carries; it becomes the source of her own illumination. Her halo proceeds from the indwelling Christ. Holiness in Christian theology is participatory rather than autonomous. The saints shine not by their own power but through communion with the divine life. As Gregory Palamas teaches, the righteous participate in the uncreated energies of God and are transformed by divine light without confusion of natures. Thus Mother Mary's radiance is entirely Christological: she shines because the Light dwells within her.

The Syriac tradition especially delights in portraying Mother Mary through images of temple, womb, and light. St Jacob of Serugh addresses her in poetry:

"O Mary, house of beauties and treasury of blessings, Mother of the Sun who generated immeasurable Light."

Such language must be understood within the symbolic world of Syriac Christianity,

where poetic imagery serves as theology in verse. Mother Mary is never worshipped as the source of light; rather, she is glorified because she bore the Uncreated Light in her womb.

For this reason, the title Mother of Light possesses profound theological significance. The Nicene Creed proclaims Christ as "Light from Light, true God from true God." The light depicted within Mary is therefore not created illumination but the eternal radiance manifested in history through the Incarnation. As St Gregory Palamas famously described her, Mary became "the boundary between the created and the uncreated." In her, the infinite God entered finite

human history without ceasing to be God.

This mystery also illuminates the Eastern Christian doctrine of *theosis* or deification. Salvation is not merely moral improvement but participation in divine life (2 Pet 1:4). Mother Mary stands as the first and fullest realization of humanity transfigured by grace. Her glorification reveals the destiny of every believer: to become radiant through communion with Christ. As Christ Himself declares, "You are the light of the world" (Mt 5:14), not by nature, but by participation in His light.

The use of the Indian *deepak* further situates this work within the tradition of inculturated Christian art, where local symbols are embraced and transformed in the light of the Gospel. The history of Christianity demonstrates that the Gospel has continually assumed local artistic languages: Greek, Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, Ethiopian, and Byzantine—while preserving the same apostolic faith. In this context, Indian Christian art may likewise employ indigenous symbols to confess the universal mystery of Christ. The *deepak* becomes not a 'syncretistic borrowing' but a transfigured symbol: a vessel through which the Light of Christ shines in an authentically Indian expression.

Ultimately, Mother of Light is not merely a portrait of Mary but an icon of divine indwelling. It invites contemplation of the profound mystery that the Uncreated Light entered the womb of the Virgin, became flesh, and illumined the world with the radiance of God's presence. In bearing Christ, Mary became the Mother of Light; and through His presence within her, she herself shines with borrowed yet real glory—the glory of God dwelling among humanity:

"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory" (Jn 1:14).

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[i] *The Divine Liturgy of Our Holy Father Basil the Great*, Hymn to the Mother of God, accessed June 18, 2026, https://ukrcatholic.org/. He who is our God before the ages, He made your womb a throne, and He made it wider than all the heavens.

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[iii] Gregory Palamas, *The Triads*, trans. John Meyendorff (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1983).

[iv] James Puthuparampil, *Mariological Thought of Mar Jacob of Serugh* (451–521) (Kottayam, Kerala: St. Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute [SEERI], 2005).

[v] Gregory Palamas, *Homily* 53, §37, quoted in Kristofer Carlson, ed., *Why Mary Matters* (Norfolk, Virginia: Dormition Publishing, 2014). The passage reads: "She alone forms the boundary between created and uncreated nature, and no one could come to God except through her and the Mediator born of her. Nor could any of the gifts that come from God be given, be it to angels or men, except through her."

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(Rev. Fr. Rijo Geevarghese is the Sacred Art Coordinator, Sopana Orthodox Academy and a priest of Ahmedabad Diocese)

Editorial Note: The Icons in this article are written by Fr. Rijo, the author of this iconographic meditation.

SAINT MARY OF EGYPT: CONVERSION, ASCETICISM, AND THE SPIRITUAL BEAUTY OF REPENTANCE

Fr. Dr. Timothy (Tenny Achen)

Introduction

Among the great saints of Christian antiquity, Saint Mary of Egypt occupies a unique place as a model of radical conversion, repentance, and holiness. Her story, preserved primarily in the seventh-century Life of Mary of Egypt written by Saint Sophronius of Jerusalem, presents one of the most dramatic transformations in Christian hagiography. From a life marked by moral disorder and sensuality, Mary became one of the most revered desert ascetics of the Eastern Christian tradition. Her life continues to inspire Christians across centuries because it demonstrates the transformative power of divine grace and the possibility of sanctity even after profound sin. Beyond its historical significance, Mary's story offers enduring spiritual lessons concerning repentance, humility, perseverance, and the human longing for God.

Historical Background and Historicity

The principal source for the life of Saint Mary of Egypt is the *Vita Mariae Aegyptiacae* composed by Sophronius, Patriarch of Jerusalem (c. 560–638)[1]. According to this account, Mary lived during the fifth century, likely during the reign of Emperor Justinian I or slightly earlier. While modern historians recognize that certain elements of the narrative contain typical hagiographical motifs, there is

substantial scholarly consensus that the story is rooted in a historical ascetic figure who lived in the Judean desert.[2]

The narrative is framed through the testimony of the monk Zosimas, who encounters Mary in the desert after decades of solitary ascetic life. Through this encounter, the text communicates both historical memory and theological teaching. As with many ancient saints' lives, the historical details are intertwined with spiritual symbolism, yet this does not diminish the significance of the account. Rather, it reflects the early Christian conviction that biography serves not merely to record facts but to reveal God's action in human lives.

The Early Life of Mary

According to Sophronius, Mary left her parents at the age of twelve and traveled to Alexandria, where she spent approximately seventeen years pursuing a life of sexual immorality.[3] The text emphasizes that her behavior was driven not primarily by economic necessity but by an uncontrolled pursuit of pleasure. Alexandria, one of the great urban centers of the Mediterranean world, symbolized for Mary a life detached from spiritual purpose and consumed by worldly desires.

Yet beneath the apparent freedom of her lifestyle lay a profound spiritual emptiness. Christian tradition often interprets this period of Mary's life as illustrative of Saint Augustine's famous insight that the human heart remains restless until it rests in God. Mary's search for satisfaction in sensual pleasure ultimately left her spiritually impoverished, preparing the ground for her dramatic encounter with divine grace.

The Conversion at Jerusalem

The decisive turning point in Mary's life occurred during a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Drawn by curiosity rather than devotion, she joined a group traveling to the Holy City for the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross.[4]

Upon arriving at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Mary attempted to enter with the crowd. However, she found herself mysteriously unable to cross the threshold. Repeated attempts failed. Observing that others entered freely, she realized that an invisible spiritual barrier prevented her from approaching the sacred place. In that moment, she became conscious of the weight of her sins and experienced profound repentance.

Looking toward an icon of the Blessed Virgin Mary, she prayed for mercy and promised to renounce her former life. After this prayer, she was able to enter the church and venerate the relic of the Holy Cross.[5] This event marks one of the most powerful conversion narratives in Christian literature. The miracle itself is significant, but more important is the interior transformation it occasioned. Mary's encounter with holiness revealed her true condition and awakened within her a desire for communion with God.

Her conversion illustrates a central Christian principle: genuine repentance arises not merely from fear of punishment but from an encounter with divine love and holiness.

Life in the Desert: The Ascetic Journey

Following her conversion, Mary crossed the Jordan River and entered the desert, where she remained for approximately forty-seven years.[6] There she embraced a life of radical asceticism characterized by prayer, fasting, solitude, and spiritual struggle.

The early years of her desert life were marked by intense temptation. Mary recounts to Zosimas that memories of her former pleasures tormented her constantly. She struggled against desires, hunger, loneliness, and despair.[7] Yet through persistent prayer and reliance upon God, these temptations gradually lost their power.

The desert occupies a central place in Christian spirituality. It is both a geographical location and a spiritual symbol. In Scripture, the desert is where Israel learned dependence upon God, where Elijah encountered the divine presence, and where Christ faced temptation. Mary's desert experience follows this biblical pattern. By stripping away worldly distractions, she entered into a deeper relationship with God.

Over time, the text portrays Mary as transformed by grace. Her body became weathered by years of austerity, yet her soul reflected remarkable spiritual beauty. When Zosimas encounters her, he recognizes in her a holiness surpassing his own despite his decades of monastic discipline. The narrative thus challenges conventional assumptions about religious achievement. Sanctity is ultimately a gift of grace rather than the result of human effort alone.

Spiritual and Theological Significance

Saint Mary of Egypt occupies a prominent place in Eastern Christian spirituality, particularly during Great Lent. The Orthodox Church commemorates her both on April 1 and on the Fifth Sunday of Lent, presenting her as an exemplar of repentance.[8]

Her story conveys several theological themes. First, it affirms the universality of God's mercy. No sin places a person beyond the reach of divine forgiveness. Mary's transformation demonstrates that grace can renew even the most broken life.

Second, her life emphasizes the necessity of repentance as an ongoing process. Conversion was not completed at the moment she entered the Holy Sepulchre. Rather, it unfolded through decades of prayer, struggle, and spiritual growth.

Third, Mary embodies the Christian understanding of freedom. Before her conversion, she appeared free but was enslaved by passions. In the desert, through self-discipline and communion with God, she discovered authentic freedom.

Finally, her life reveals the paradox of Christian holiness: true greatness is found in humility. Mary spent nearly half a century hidden from the world, seeking neither recognition nor honor. Yet her witness became a source of inspiration for generations of believers.

Spiritual Lessons from the Life of Saint Mary of Egypt

Several spiritual lessons emerge from the life of Saint Mary of Egypt.

First, no person should despair of God's mercy. Mary's conversion demonstrates that divine grace can transform even the most troubled past into a testimony of redemption.

Second, authentic repentance requires both sorrow for sin and commitment to change. Mary's life illustrates that conversion is not merely emotional but practical and sustained.

Third, spiritual growth often occurs through struggle. Mary's years in the desert remind believers that holiness is cultivated through perseverance amid temptation and difficulty.

Fourth, silence and solitude remain valuable disciplines in an age marked by constant distraction. Mary's withdrawal into the desert symbolizes the need to create interior space where God can be encountered.

Finally, her life teaches that true beauty is spiritual rather than external. The ascetic who appeared physically impoverished became radiant through communion with God. Her transformation reveals the Christian conviction that holiness is the highest form of human flourishing.

Conclusion

Saint Mary of Egypt stands as one of Christianity's most compelling witnesses to

the power of repentance and divine grace. Whether considered historically, theologically, or spiritually, her life offers a profound testimony to God's ability to renew the human person. From the streets of Alexandria to the solitude of the Judean desert, her journey reflects the universal human movement from sin to redemption, from restlessness to peace, and from self-centeredness to communion with God. Her story continues to challenge and inspire believers, reminding them that holiness remains possible for all who respond to God's call with humility, courage, and perseverance.

Endnotes

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[8] Kallistos Ware, *The Lenten Triodion* (London: Faber and Faber, 1978), 57–60.

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(Rev. Fr. Dr. Timothy [Tenny] Thomas is the Vicar of St. Gregorios Orthodox Church, Raleigh, NC, USA. He is also serving as Adjunct Assistant Professor at St. John's University, New York and Guest Lecturer at St. Tikhon's Orthodox Theological Seminary, Pennsylvania)

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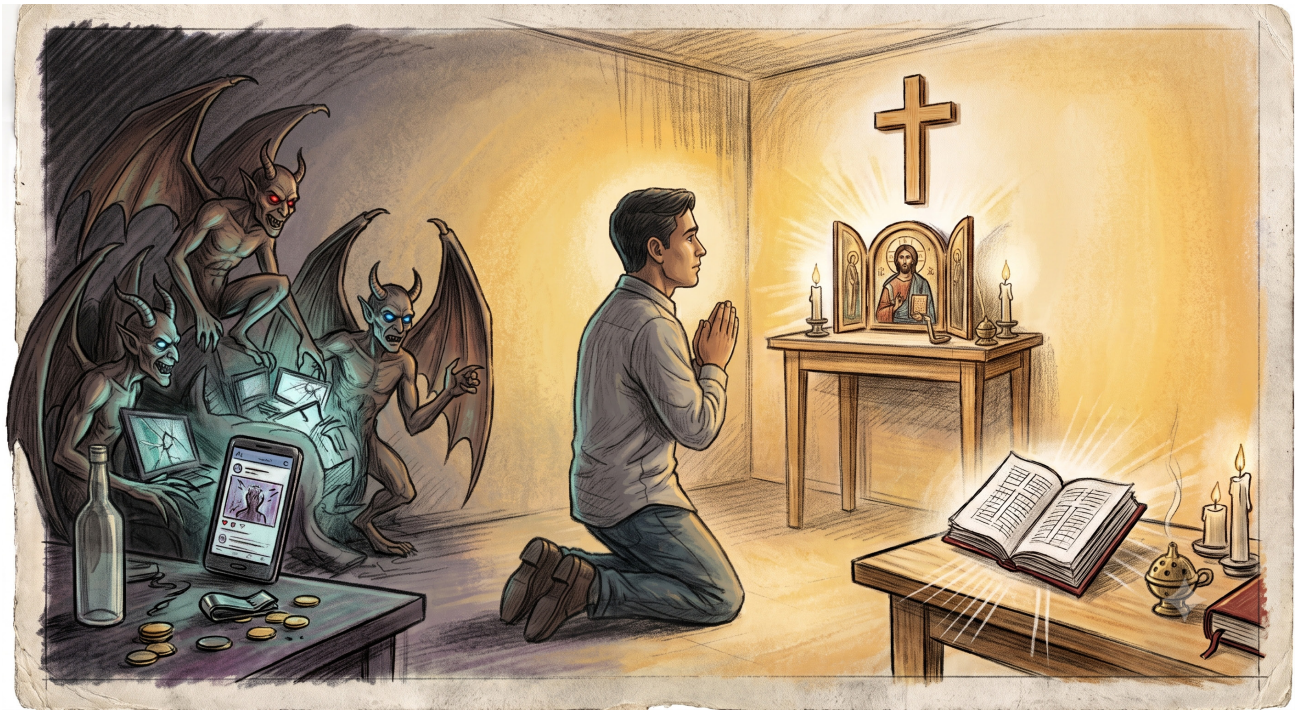

Unseen Spiritual Warfare: The Hidden Battle of the Human Heart

Fr. Basil Saji Zacharia

The concept of unseen spiritual warfare which is rooted deeply in ancient wisdom literature and upheld by diverse Christian denominations/traditions, explores the invisible forces that shape our lives, beliefs, and destinies beyond the material realm. It delves into the ongoing battle against personal deficiencies, sins, and spiritual adversaries with the ultimate aim of drawing nearer to the divine. This warfare is not fought with weapons or armies, but within the human heart, mind, and soul. It is rooted in the Eastern Orthodox tradition and emphasized in texts like The Philokalia, Spiritual Warfare, and other ascetical texts. This spiritual struggle challenges us to resist pride, lust, hatred, and despair, not just as emotions, but as extra ordinary forces that seek to distort the image of God within us.

The Nature of the Battle

Unseen Spiritual Warfare is a dimension of human existence that often remains invisible, yet has a significant impact on our spiritual journey. This explores the invisible forces that mold our lives, beliefs, and fates, going beyond

the confines of the material world. The whole purpose of Unseen Warfare is to offer Christian teaching concerning the perfection of the virtues necessary to accomplish the greatest and most perfect thing that a human may desire to attain: to come near to God and dwell in union with Him. Unlike popular portrayals of spiritual battle as dramatic exorcisms or direct confrontations with demons, this warfare is mostly interior. It is fought in the mind, through thoughts (logismoi), habits, and desires that either lead us to God or draw us away from Him. Jesus taught us to ask the Father to "deliver us from the evil one" (Matt. 6:13), emphasizing the need for continual vigilance and spiritual battle. Thus, spiritual warfare is not merely a battle against external forces, but an inner journey of purification, transformation, and communion with God.

Spiritual warfare is not a myth or metaphor but a lived reality, a continuous struggle for holiness and union with God. Unlike physical conflicts, this battle is waged within the soul, where temptations arise, virtues are tested, and the very image of God within us is refined. It is unceasing because the forces we fight are sin, passions, thoughts, demonic influence that never fully retreat. And it is unseen because the enemy does not often announce himself; he works in suggestion, thought, habit, ideology, and apathy within us.

Unseen Spiritual Warfare: Patristic Viewpoint

'Philokalia', a treasury of Orthodox mystical and ascetic writings, teaches that unseen warfare is the internal fight to overcome the passions - those disordered desires that separate us from God. It is the fight to purify the heart, mind, and soul through watchfulness (nepsis), prayer, humility, and repentance. Early Christian thinkers such as St. John Climacus, Evagrios the Solitary, and St. Maximos the Confessor, describe this warfare in much detail. They do not speak of grand spiritual feats, but of daily vigilance for resisting sinful thoughts (logismoi), cultivating virtue, confessing failures, and remaining united to Christ in prayer. In this battle, the enemy is not primarily external. As St. Mark the Ascetic wrote, "He who hates the passions gets rid of their causes." Pride, hatred, lust, and despair are not just moral failings; they are deeply spiritual forces that bind the soul. And yet, God in His love permits these battles, not to destroy us, but to refine us, draw us into humility, and unite us with Himself.

Scriptural Foundations: The Bible and the Reality of Spiritual Struggle

From the Garden of Eden to the wilderness temptation of Christ, from the Psalms to Paul's epistles, Scripture portrays the spiritual life as a battle for the heart.

- Ephesians 6:12 teaches: "for our struggle is not against blood and flesh but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.
- Jesus prays in John 17 that His disciples be protected from the evil one.
- Paul exhorts believers to "Therefore take up the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to withstand on the evil day and, having prevailed against everything, to stand firm." (Eph. 6:13).

These images affirm that unseen warfare is not merely psychological but deeply spiritual and scriptural, involving both our interior world and cosmic forces. Christ Himself exemplified this in the wilderness, where His weapon was not violence, but the Word of God and absolute trust in the Father. We too can fight this battle with the following weapons:

- **Watchfulness (Nepsis):** Be alert to the movement of thoughts and emotions.
- **Prayer:** Especially the Jesus Prayer, which anchors the soul in Christ's presence.

- **Fasting:** Not only from food, but from excess desires, distraction, ego, and comfort.
- **Confession:** Regular sacramental confession purifies the soul and humbles the heart.
- **Scripture:** Meditating on the Word of God renews the mind and strengthens the will.

The Battleground Within: Thoughts, Desires, and the Heart

In Orthodox theology, the battleground of spiritual warfare is the nous, the eye of the soul. Here, thoughts arise, temptations take root, and choices are made. The Fathers identify three kinds of thoughts: divine, human, and demonic. As St. John Cassian says, "As long as wrong thoughts remain hidden, they hold sway over a person; but once they are discovered, they are immediately weakened." The great ascetic labor is to remain watchful over the heart, to recognize the source of each thought, and to reject those that are from the enemy.

Modern Echoes: Spiritual Warfare in Today's World

Unseen Spiritual warfare involves the struggle for divine purposes, impacting both individuals and communities. While traditional Christian thought emphasized expressions of demonic activity, contemporary contexts reveal more subtle manifestations, such as ideological deception, moral decline, and spiritual apathy. The pressures of contemporary life and modern ideological shifts, such as Secularism, materialism, post-modernism and post-humanism, have contributed to the minimization of spiritual realities, often lowering them to the realm of myth or psychological phenomena. So, great importance must be given to the inner struggles associated with unseen spiritual warfare.

The concept of combating disturbing thoughts aligns closely with modern psychological practices like cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT), which focuses on recognizing and managing negative thought patterns. The pervasive nature of digital media and virtual spaces also creates new battlegrounds for spiritual warfare, influencing values, relationships, and even personal identity. These distractions fragment the mind, making it difficult to remain focused on God or cultivate spiritual stillness. A growing moral relativism erodes ethical clarity, turning hearts away from holiness and blurring the distinction between good and evil.

Meanwhile, injustices whether racial, economic, or environmental are not merely social or political issues but spiritual strongholds rooted in greed, apathy, and lust for power. The Church must respond through inner transformation, communal action, and prophetic witness, illuminating Christ's victory over all powers of darkness.

Conclusion

Unseen and unceasing spiritual warfare is the narrow path that leads to life (Matthew 7:14). It is the daily labour of saying no to ego and yes to Christ. It is the unseen tears shed in repentance, the quiet acts of love done in secret, the thoughts rejected before they become sins.

Victory in this battle does not come through human power or might, but through surrender to Christ, openness to grace, and the slow and sacred process of transformation. The Cross is our standard, the Holy Spirit is our strength, and love is our ultimate weapon. Let us then take up arms not in fear, but with faith in God. Let us fight the good fight, keep the faith, and finish the race. For the battle belongs to the Lord, and through Him, we become more than conquerors.

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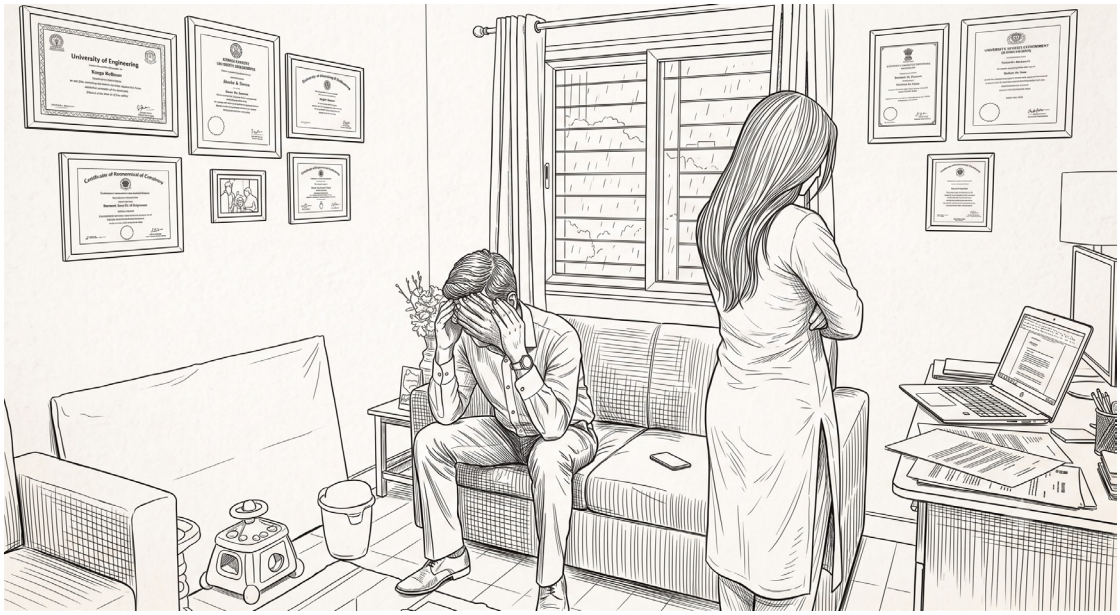
(Rev. Fr.. Basil Saji Zacharia is Assistant Vicar of St. Paul's Orthodox Church, Kolladu, Kottayam and OCYM Kottayam District President)



Emotional Intelligence: The Missing Skill in India's Empowerment Discourse

Dr. Edith Jacob

India has spent decades investing in the skills needed to build a stronger economy, but far less attention has been paid to the skills needed to build healthier relationships, stronger families, and a more compassionate society. We are producing more graduates than ever before, building a globally competitive workforce, embracing digital transformation, and investing heavily in skill development. Yet, alongside these achievements, we are witnessing an unsettling rise in relationship conflicts, family breakdowns, workplace stress, mental health concerns, and acts of violence that often stem from an inability to manage emotions constructively. We as individuals have invested significantly in technical education, professional training, and employability. However, very little attention has been given to emotional intelligence, conflict resolution, empathy, communication, and mental well-being. We need to understand that a highly educated individual is not necessarily an emotionally mature one.

The consequences of neglecting emotional intelligence are becoming increasingly visible in society. Almost every day, we hear or read news reports of conflicts between young couples escalating into harassment, violence, and, in some tragic cases, even murder. While such incidents may have multiple underlying causes, they often reveal an inability to manage emotions such as anger, jealousy, rejection, insecurity, and frustration in healthy ways. Academic excellence and professional qualifications

alone do not equip individuals to navigate relationships, resolve disagreements, cope with rejection, or communicate effectively under stress. Emotional intelligence helps individuals understand their own emotions, empathize with others, regulate impulsive reactions, and handle conflicts constructively. If these skills are cultivated from an early age through school education, young people may be better prepared to build healthy relationships and make responsible decisions, both in their personal and professional lives.

Many young people enter marriage equipped with degrees but unprepared for the emotional complexities of relationships, joint family structures, financial stress, caregiving responsibilities, or interpersonal conflict. In households where emotional regulation is poor, disagreements quickly escalate into humiliation, manipulation, silent treatment or psychological abuse. The consequences are not merely personal but family conflicts have wider social and economic implications. Emotional distress affects productivity, labour force participation, children's development, healthcare expenditure, and overall social stability.

We as a country urgently need structured emotional intelligence and behavioural skills education for our schools and our higher education systems not as a luxury, but as a social necessity. Such programmes can focus on building emotionally healthy ecosystems grounded in dignity, mutual respect, and responsible behaviour. As artificial intelligence transforms economies and workplaces, society must recognise that emotional intelligence is no longer a "soft skill." It is a survival skill — essential for healthy families, social harmony, mental well-being, and human dignity. In an era that is increasingly shaped by artificial intelligence, emotional intelligence may become one of the most important human skills of all. Technology can replicate information and efficiency, but empathy, emotional resilience, compassion, and emotional maturity remain difficult to automate. Historically, as a country we have led conversations on ethics, relationships, duty, and social harmony through our philosophical traditions, yet modern education has increasingly prioritised technical competence while neglecting emotional and relational wisdom. Reintegrating these dimensions into contemporary education may be one of the most important social reforms in the present times.

If emotional intelligence is to become a meaningful part of India's skill agenda, it cannot be left to chance. Schools must consciously create opportunities for students to develop self-awareness, empathy, resilience, and interpersonal competence. Some practical ways of achieving this are:

(i) Integrate Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) into the Curriculum

Emotional intelligence should not be treated as a separate subject taught once a week. Instead, it should be woven into everyday learning. Teachers can encourage students to reflect on their emotions, discuss ethical dilemmas, and engage in activities that require perspective-taking. Example: After a group project, students could be asked not only what they learned academically but also how they felt when disagreements arose and how they resolved them. Literature classes can discuss the emotions and motivations of characters, helping students develop empathy.

(ii) Use Experiential and Activity-Based Learning

Students learn emotions best by experiencing and reflecting on them rather than by memorizing definitions. Activities such as role-plays, theatre, debates, simulations, and problem-solving exercises help students

navigate real-life social situations. Example: A classroom role-play on bullying can help students understand the emotions of the victim, the bystander, and the perpetrator, fostering empathy and responsible decision-making.

(iii) Train Teachers as Emotional Intelligence Mentors

Teachers play a crucial role in shaping students' emotional development. However, many teachers themselves have never received formal training in emotional intelligence. Professional development programmes should equip them with skills to recognize emotional distress, encourage healthy expression of emotions, and create psychologically safe classrooms. Example: Instead of immediately disciplining a disruptive student, a teacher trained in emotional intelligence might first explore whether the behaviour stems from anxiety, family stress, or social exclusion.

(iv) Introduce Structured Emotional Intelligence Programmes

Schools can dedicate periodic sessions to topics such as self-awareness, stress management, empathy, communication, conflict resolution, and responsible decision-making. Example: A monthly "Life Skills Hour" could focus on handling peer pressure, managing examination stress, expressing disagreement respectfully, or coping with failure.

(v) Encourage Creative and Reflective Expression

Art, music, storytelling, journaling, and creative writing provide students with safe avenues to explore and express emotions that they may otherwise struggle to articulate. Example: Students can maintain an "emotion journal" where they record significant experiences, reflect on their reactions, and identify healthier ways of responding to similar situations in the future.

(vi) Promote Collaboration Over Competition

While academic excellence remains important, schools must create spaces where students learn to work together rather than constantly compete against one another. Collaboration develops empathy, trust, and respect for diverse viewpoints. Example: Community service projects, peer mentoring programmes, and collaborative assignments teach students that success is often achieved collectively rather than individually.

(vii) Build a School Culture that Values Emotional Well-being

Ultimately, emotional intelligence cannot flourish in an environment driven solely by marks and rankings. Schools must foster a culture where kindness, respect, resilience, and emotional well-being are valued alongside academic achievement. Example: Recognizing students for acts of empathy, teamwork, integrity, and leadership can send a powerful message that character matters as much as grades.

As artificial intelligence increasingly automates routine cognitive tasks, the qualities that will distinguish successful individuals are likely to be deeply human, the ones like empathy, self-awareness, adaptability, ethical judgment, and the ability to build meaningful relationships. If India truly seeks to prepare its young people for the future, emotional intelligence must become an integral part of school education rather than an afterthought in the skill development discourse.

If we truly wish to build safer homes and healthier communities, we must begin by recognising that emotional intelligence is not optional but it is foundational to human well-being. Perhaps the next major step in empowering humans (not just women) is not only financial or legal empowerment, but emotional empowerment — the ability to

navigate relationships with self-worth, empathy, resilience, and wisdom. A society that teaches people how to earn, but not how to emotionally coexist, leaves one of its deepest problems unresolved.

A society cannot sustainably progress if its homes are emotionally fractured. Emotional intelligence, empathy, communication, and behavioural awareness must therefore become integral to education and public discourse. As we prepare young people for careers in an AI-driven world, we must also prepare them for the far more complex task of being emotionally responsible human beings.

Editorial note: This article draws our attention to the dire need of enlightening us especially the New Gen with relational wisdom and emotional intelligence. The author rightly highlights the fact that academic excellence , proficiency in technology & artificial intelligence, and glorious professional achievements alone will not ensure healthy relationships , successful family life and development of values like compassion and integrity. In addition to secular approaches, an exploration to make use of rich spiritual resources of all religious traditions is also important to address this grave issue. Studies and reflections on the Gospels and the Christian spiritual classics and the lives of saintly authors are extremely beneficial in this regard.

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(Dr. Edith Jacob is Assistant Professor in the Department of Economics at Christ University, Bangalore (Yeshwantpur Campus). She belongs to the St. Thomas Orthodox Valiyapally, Mathapara, Nilackal Diocese)

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A LAYPERSON LOOKS AT THE WORLD OF DISEASES

Kuruvilla M. George, IRS (Retd.)

As we all know, there are two ways of looking at anything: positive or negative; active or passive; appreciative or critical; professional or as a layperson and so on. Recently, I tried to make a study of the Holy Bible, that too, from the perspective of how a layperson looks at it. It was quite interesting, as it helped me avoid all theological jargon, which is not my domain. Here, I am trying to look at the world of diseases, through the eyes of the layperson.

Diseases are like accidents. We do not wish for, expect or welcome diseases; rather, we are afraid of them since they lead to considerable physical, mental, financial and social imbalances that disrupt the harmony of our lives. The dictionary defines 'disease' as "illness" of the body in humans, animals and plants. For me, it is simply "dis-ease" which means, something that destroys the 'ease' of our life. When we are sick, we are uneasy; those around us are also uncomfortable. So, we will briefly look at how diseases affect the patient, the family, bystanders, hospitals and care givers. Nowadays, any opinion, even when harmless, can become controversial. However, what I try to record here is only my humble view, and my readers are free to have their own informed views without the fear of any

contradiction from me, and vice versa.

To be sick is a misfortune, but to diagnose the sickness at the earliest stage is a blessing. Recently, I had such an experience. A casual conversation with a doctor friend led me to undergo a few tests and, to my surprise, resulted in the early diagnosis of a cardiac problem. It was fortunate that it was detected well before it manifested as a heart attack. Most diseases give us some warning signals but we normally ignore or overlook them. Either, we believe that time will heal them, or we are worried about the inconveniences that the disease may cause. The tragedy is that these warning signs are disregarded or not recognized until the condition becomes a major issue.

Diagnosis has two parts , first one is to identify the disease, and second, to find out the cause for the same. In the olden days it was mainly done by intuition but now machines do the major part. We may be aware of the pros and cons of this process. In the past, doctors could look at a patient, make an assessment of the patient's condition, and start the treatment. But now machines take a longer time to bring out their observations and inferences, during which period the patient remains with the feeling that the treatment has already begun. One main reason for this is the absence of "family doctors". Now we have more specialists and technicians who look at the body in "part" according to their field of specialization. Nobody looks at you as a "whole body" but just as spare parts, as if you are a vehicle put in a workshop.

The announcement of a disease is a primary shock to any patient, or immediately the patient becomes 'impatient'. Normally the first reaction is "why did this happen to me?" ... and more specifically "why this happened only to me?" (Frankly, we are not so concerned if it happens to others.) We may succeed in controlling our feelings, but we will be weeping in our hearts. We lose our strength. We succumb to depression. We blame God for not taking care of us beforehand. We ask God, why did this not happen to others! We look to the left and right for help and guidance.

I know one elderly lady who did not blame God for her sickness. She was admitted to a hospital in Central Travancore to undergo amputation of both legs at the knee level. She was suffering from severe diabetes. Maybe, it was a time when early awareness and detection were not so common. We can imagine her situation. If we were in her position, we would have sunk into fathoms of despair. But she requested the hospital authorities to arrange for a mike system near her bed. I should not say 'sick bed' since it became a bed of hope for many. Every morning and evening, her songs and prayers reverberated within the walls of the hospital. My readers can say that such a thing is humanly impossible, but this was a reality.

When others are sick, we are there to feed them with medical advice and words of caution. Everyone is a half-doctor, either from one's own experience or from the knowledge acquired from Google. In our stories, we exaggerate the severity and extent of the disease, describe the trauma of some people who, in our opinion, suffered from the same disease, and end up with which hospital one should go to, which doctor one should consult and which medicines one should take. We will even promise that we will pray for them but frankly how many of us sincerely pray for the patients known to us. Let us also recollect whether, at least once, we have told anyone "I will take care of you!"

When you are sick, your near ones may not take it as an opportunity to serve or look after you.

You are lucky if you have a Mother Teresa on your side, for she believed that she

was serving Jesus, when she took care of a patient. We may not tell it openly, but many reactions are untold. Now all are busy and we don't have enough time to spare for others. Parents, spouses or close relatives may not get leave from their work places. Absence from work may result in losing the job. It is worse when you yourself are the breadwinner in the family. There is nobody to substitute you in the nuclear families. This becomes more complicated if hospitalization becomes necessary. In many places people live alone and nobody may even know they are sick unless there is someone to listen to them or enquire about them. Friends are many on WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram, but there may be no one nearby when needed. We are reminded that, a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. We cannot even think of the positive aspects of the joint family system now.

This leads us to the role of care givers. The common solution is the "home nurse". My readers should excuse me when I take the liberty to say that the word "nurse" is polluted by the word 'home nurse'. There is no element of service, sympathy or empathy. The agencies have made it a third-degree business by providing people with no skill or kindness. The reputed agencies, on the other hand, have made it unapproachable to common people. The care givers take more care of themselves only. They are happier if the patient is unconscious. However, the silver line is that there are a few persons who take care of the patients as if they are their own relatives!

In case a patient remains sick for a long time, especially when bed-ridden, it affects the rhythm of the entire family. Medical expenses are very high and unbearable unless there is some support like insurance. But the word 'insurance' itself opens another Pandora's box. On the one hand, it is a relief for the patient but at the same time it speaks volumes of exploitation in the medical field.

Coming to Hospitals, we pray "lead us not into hospitals". Whereas admission to a hospital is inevitable with the onset of a disease, it is frankly the last thing that we desire. Hospitals are no longer charitable institutions even if they claim to be so for their own publicity. When Jesus Christ saw a sick person, He was moved with compassion and that compassion led to healing. But now, it is no longer Jesus who runs the healthcare system! The investments are high, the expenses are competitive, and profit is the chief motive. As a result, sympathy, empathy and compassion alone cannot sustain the hospital. Now most of the good hospitals and large healthcare institutions have been virtually taken over by foreign hospitals or pharmaceutical companies, and are increasingly influenced by commercial interests, making private healthcare a burden and a nightmare, rather than a source of comfort for many.

As for doctors, they are working under severe professional pressure. They have to justify the high salary they receive, and are expected to generate sufficient use of the expensive machinery and facilities installed at high cost. So, they are forced to overlook sympathy and empathy, even though they are basically good, dedicated and highly qualified professionals. Instead of a soothing word and a healing touch, the pressures of the system can sometimes lead to an approach that might tend to frighten the patient. In this context, I salute the handful of doctors with a human touch, whom many patients look upon as 'God'. I know many a doctor who come and sit near the patient, take the patient's hand in his and say "you are going to be alright". This simple act of presence, reassurance, and compassion becomes a healing touch. In moments of suffering and agony, it is often this human connection that a patient needs most.

Whenever I think of hospitals, I cannot forget to mention one good word about the Nurses. Sans any introduction, we call them "sisters". How does this relation come? It is born from their presence, care, and the trust they inspire. Though they have their own personal problems and financial challenges they have a smile and a word of comfort for the patient. I salute the Malayali nurses serving all over the world for the value they have in the eyes of the patients, though not in the eyes of the hospital barons. Most of the nurses command our trust, perhaps because they stand close to the suffering person and are not seen as owners or administrators of the system.

Diseases are a possibility. Treatment is a must. But what is the solution for the problems that we face in the medical field? The first one is the advice given by Jesus: "Love your neighbour as thyself." This means that we are called to practice 'empathy': to enter into the suffering of our neighbour, to feel their pain, and to respond with compassion."

Second is the role of the religious institutions. For long we have been practicing "People for the existence of Religion". Let us rewrite it as "Religion for the people". For thousands of years, religions have been thriving at the cost of the people and teaching them how to live life after death. But now let's help them to lead their life on earth, with dignity, peace, justice, and compassion. All religions are called to use their infrastructure to help their people live on this earth peacefully. They have to be the real care givers, bringing comfort to the wounded, hope to the hopeless, and compassion to those who are in need!

Today, many religious institutions, especially Christian communities, are taking efforts to run Old Age homes (better known as Retirement Homes) and Day Care Centers, as well as Palliative Care Homes. This is a commendable initiative, as long as it is not a business, but remains rooted in care and compassion rather than becoming commercial ventures. So, the religious institutions have to concentrate more on caregiving, - standing with people in their moments of vulnerability, loneliness, sickness, and old age. Simultaneously, we have to identify and encourage persons who are ready to take care of others as charity or profession, but manageable in terms of accessibility and affordability for the beneficiaries, so that our fellow beings have a peaceful life … and death.

Politicians have a big role in transforming our medical system. The main step is to upgrade the government hospitals and to control the insurance business. Once the British people came to India and took away our treasures. We shouted "Quit India" and got them out. Now we are bringing all foreign hands to do business in India under the guise of "Foreign Direct Investment". Huge profits are knowingly siphoned out of India and we are not bothered since the bounties are shared by the Indian agents who brought them here. A country with the world's largest population is at the mercy of a few autocrats , no matter to whichever political party they belong to. When religion and politics become instruments for exploiting people, where will we go for relief and solutions? Religion, politics, and social structures must therefore rediscover their true purpose: to protect human dignity, promote justice, and serve the common good.

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(Sri. Kuruvilla M. George IRS, Retired Additional Commissioner of Income Tax, Former Member of the Malankara Sabha Managing Committee/ Working Committee/Advisory Board to HH The Catholicos, Former Secretary of the Alwaye Fellowship House, and presently , President of All Kerala Income Tax Pensioners' Welfare Association& Member of St. John's Orthodox Church , Vakathanam)

ECUMENISM IN ASIA: EMERGING ECCLESIAL AND ECUMENICAL LANDSCAPES

Susan Jacob

"WHOEVER HAS EARS, LET THEM HEAR WHAT THE SPIRIT SAYS TO THE CHURCHES."

(REVELATION 2:7)

(Editor's Note: This article reflects on the International Consultation on Ecumenism in Asia: Emerging Ecclesial and Ecumenical Landscapes, held in Chiang Mai, Thailand, from 1–3 June 2026. The consultation, organized by the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), brought together over seventy church and ecumenical leaders, mission partners, and representatives from many churches, traditions, countries and cultures across Asia and beyond.)

The journey of the Church in Asia unfolds within a rapidly changing ecclesial, social, and cultural landscape—a moment of profound transformation that calls the churches to deeper communion, renewed discernment, and a shared witness to the Gospel. As the churches seek to respond faithfully to the signs of the times, the ecumenical movement encounters new opportunities and challenges to rediscover its prophetic calling, remaining rooted in Christ's prayer, 'that all may be one' (John 17:21). This ongoing journey invites us to reflect on the rich historical witness of Asian churches, whose faith has been shaped amid the diverse cultures, religions, and realities of the continent.

Throughout history, Asian churches have made significant contributions to the life of Asia. Rooted in some of the earliest Christian communities, Asian Christianity has grown through diverse historical periods, cultural encounters, and local expressions of faith.

From the ancient traditions of the churches in West Asia and the enduring witness of the Saint Thomas Christian communities in India to the various expressions of Christianity that emerged across East, Southeast, and Central Asia, the churches have journeyed alongside the peoples of the region through changing times and circumstances.

Amid the immense diversity of languages, cultures, religions, and social realities of Asia, the churches have continually sought to embody the Gospel in ways that are meaningful within their contexts. They have nurtured indigenous expressions of faith, engaged in education and healthcare, stood alongside marginalized communities in situations marked by conflict and oppression, advocated for justice and peace, promoted reconciliation, strengthened ecumenical fellowship, and participated in interreligious dialogue. Through their service, compassion, prophetic witness, and commitment to the common good, the churches in Asia have borne witness to God's transforming love among the peoples of the continent. In recent decades, the churches have also increasingly engaged in ecological advocacy and environmental stewardship, responding to the urgent challenges of climate change and ecological degradation. Through their commitment to holistic mission and care for creation, they continue to participate in God's mission of renewing all life.

We gratefully remember the Asian church leaders, theologians, women, youth, pastors, and countless faithful whose witness has enriched and sustained Christianity and the ecumenical movement in Asia. The churches of Asia are not merely recipients of Christian history; they are active participants in shaping expressions of faith within the continent's many cultures and contexts.

The Changing Ecclesial Landscape

The ecclesial landscape in Asia is undergoing profound transformation. The most significant change is the shifting of the global centre of gravity of Christianity to the Global South, making Asia not only a recipient of missionaries, but also a vibrant sender of missionaries to many parts of the world.

Christianity, which began in Asia, is growing in many parts of the continent, even while Christians remain minorities in most countries. New and diverse forms of Christian community have emerged across Asia, including independent Pentecostal and charismatic churches, house churches, diaspora congregations, cyber churches, and other flexible worshipping communities. While these expressions reflect vitality and missionary commitment, they also raise urgent questions about ecclesial identity, accountability, and participation in the wider conciliar fellowship of the churches. Across Asia, the emerging realities of 'belonging without believing' and 'believing without belonging' invite the churches to re-examine the meaning of faith, community, and witness in a rapidly changing religious landscape.

In many contexts, Migration and the growth of Asian Christian Diaspora communities are reshaping the life, mission, and self-understanding of churches in Asia. Migrant families carry their faith with them and constitute mobile communities of witness. Such communities embody the shared life in Christ across cultures and generations, enriching the mission of the Church. However, migration presents both pastoral challenges and missional opportunities, calling the churches to ministries of hospitality, accompaniment, protection, and advocacy.

At the same time, migration creates additional pastoral challenges for churches in places of origin, where elderly family members are often left behind when younger members migrate overseas. Such situations call for

accompaniment, care, and solidarity, especially for older persons who may face isolation, vulnerability, and the absence of essential support. It also calls for pastoral attention to spouses, children, and other family members who carry the burdens of separation, sustaining family life across distances with resilience, sacrifice, and hope.

Confessing Our Brokenness

Though the ancient churches of Asia bore witness to the faith for centuries and embodied a shared understanding of the Church as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic; subsequent missionary expansion often introduced denominational divisions and parallel ecclesial structures. Over time, these divisions were reinforced by the strengthening and nurturing of denominational loyalties at the expense of Christian fellowship, leading communities to choose competition over cooperation. In doing so, the visible unity of the Church was weakened and the credibility of our common witness to the Gospel was diminished.

As the Church seeks to discern its mission in the present age, we confess that the churches have too often retreated into safety while people at large continue to suffer due to polarisation, far-right extremism, religious extremism, politicisation of religion, authoritarian military dictatorship, rampant militarisation, violence, poverty, forced migration, mental health crises, ecological crisis, and environmental degradation and the shrinking of democratic and human rights spaces.

We confess our failure to accompany people who are in need of the healing of memories, to overcome the historical trauma of their suffering affected during the authoritarian regimes and enduring structures of domination, as well as the traumatic experiences of religious minorities and vulnerable communities, especially women and children, who continue to suffer discrimination, displacement, insecurity and fear.

We confess our failure to engage deeply with young people, to empower their leadership, and to receive their spiritual gifts, as well as our loss of ecumenical memory and our tendency to allow outside forces to shape our agenda.

Challenges for Ecumenism in Asia

• The growth and formation of isolated networks, parallel structures, and alternative platforms often termed as "ecumenical archipelagos" have fragmented the ecumenical movement in Asia. Some arise from renewed denominationalism, funding imbalances, or changing missional strategies of former mission agencies operating in Asia.

• These emerging ecumenical networks and initiatives, though valuable in many ways, do not always sufficiently recognize the role of local churches or enable their full participation in united mission and witness.

• The need of the hour is for churches, mission agencies, and ecumenical partners to strengthen and accompany local churches, working in mutual respect and partnership rather than creating parallel structures that bypass conciliar fellowships.

• True ecumenical engagement calls for deeper communion, shared responsibility, and a commitment to walking together in the mission of God.

• Conciliar structures must remain living instruments of communion and mission, not become limited by institutional bureaucracy.

• Another challenge before ecumenism is the tendency to separate Christian unity from shared mission. Ecumenism and evangelisation belong together in God's mission, as the Church is called to proclaim the Gospel through a common witness to justice, mercy, and truth.

The challenges before the ecumenical movement are real, yet they also invite the churches to discern new possibilities for communion, collaboration, and shared witness. Rather than remaining defined by past divisions and present struggles, the churches are called to seek a renewed path together—one marked by listening, humility, and hope.

Moving Forward Together

• **Synodal Ecumenism:** Synodality and ecumenism belong together as we journey in the Spirit through prayer, listening, dialogue, and shared responsibility, strengthening collaboration in justice, peace, reconciliation, and care for creation while continuing honest theological engagement.

• **Renewing Discipleship and Mission:** Love is the visible mark of Christian discipleship, calling the churches in Asia to form communities rooted in communion, contextual witness, and participation in God's mission of healing, reconciliation, and hope.

• **From Competition to Collaboration:** The churches are called to move beyond a "my church" mindset toward a shared vision of God's Kingdom, where diversity is embraced and unity is expressed through cooperation rather than competition.

• **Accompaniment, Advocacy, and Peacebuilding:** In the midst of conflicts, violence, displacement, and human rights struggles across Asia and beyond, churches are called to stand with suffering communities through solidarity, advocacy, reconciliation, and peacebuilding.

• **Interfaith Dialogue and Public Witness:** Asia's religious diversity calls Christians to humility, dialogue, and cooperation, rejecting the misuse of religion for exclusion and violence while promoting peace, justice, and human dignity.

• **Women's Leadership:** The gifts and leadership of women in the churches and ecumenical movement must be recognized and strengthened through fuller participation at all levels.

• **Youth Participation:** Young people are bearers of hope and vision, and their voices must be welcomed in shaping the future of the Church and its mission.

• **Welcoming the Stranger:** Churches and ecumenical bodies are called to welcome migrants, refugees, and diaspora communities through hospitality, inclusion, and shared witness.

Our Commitments

Putting it concisely, we are called to commit ourselves to renewing ecumenism as a spiritual movement rooted in prayer, repentance, and openness to the Holy Spirit, while strengthening conciliar fellowship through lived communion, witness, and action beyond institutional maintenance. In this shared journey, we seek to resist denominationalism, cultivate synodal listening and mutual accountability, hold together proclamation and justice, and uphold human dignity, human rights, and care for creation as faithful stewards of God's household.

Journeying Forward in Hope

Trusting in the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the faithfulness of God, we go forward in hope. With gratitude for the ecumenical pioneers who have gone before us and with hope for future generations, let us pledge ourselves to walk together in faith, witness together in love, and serve together in God's mission.

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(Mrs. Susan Jacob is a retired Senior Audit Officer and serves on the Advisory Board of the Malankara Sabha English Quarterly. She is a member of St. Peter's and St. Paul's Orthodox Church, Koyambedu, Chennai.)

Building the Church Within: The Spiritual Awakening at COLT

(Camp for Orthodox Leadership Training)

Jenet, Lisa, Lispeth and Herie

(Editorial note: We are delighted to introduce the readers to COLT (Camp for Orthodox Leadership Training). Since its inception in 1989, COLT has been a visionary program dedicated to serving a specific group of young people aged 17–35 who were born and/or raised outside Kerala. Over the past 30+ years, COLT has nurtured hundreds of leaders within our Church, both in India and abroad. Initially supported by the MGOCSM and, more recently, by the Mission Board of the Calcutta Diocese, the program is the brainchild of Fr. Philip Kuruvilla, who, together with his family, has been the driving force behind its outstanding success and execution. You are invited to discover COLT through the eyes of four inspired young participants as they share their experiences from COLT 2026.)

For most of us, this week was a shock to the system and a healing one. We came from cities of concrete, screens, noise, alarms, traffic jams, deadlines, and anxieties we had mistaken for normal. In seven days, Kerala rewired us. We traded phone notifications for birdsong; air-conditioning for the cool breath of a waterfall, rush-hour for river-hour, watching the Meenachil and Pampa move without haste. The city teaches us to guard our time; the land taught us to release it. Slowly, our shoulders relaxed, our sleep deepened, and our eyes lifted from screens to creation. The impact wasn't abstract. It was in our lungs, breathing slower. It was in our eyes, looking up instead of down at screens. It was in our prayers, which stopped sounding like emails to God and started sounding like conversation. We left with a new problem: how to keep this stillness when the world gets loud again.

COLT 2026 (May 24–30) talked about leadership, about climate change, about the future of worship. But Kerala was the other text we read every day. The seminary gardens taught us rootedness. The rubber trees taught us giving. The monsoon taught us surrender. The backwaters taught us patience. The hills taught us quiet. The sea taught us humility. The

paddy fields taught us persistence.

Looking back, COLT 2026 was never just about the sessions, speakers, or places we visited. Those formed the structure of the week, but what made the experience memorable were the moments in between the conversations on bus rides, the laughter during meals, the friendships formed over shared experiences, and the quiet moments of reflection that no schedule could ever capture.

One of the most impactful moments came during the mid-COLT review in Kochi. What initially seemed like a routine evaluation turned into something far deeper. Participants were encouraged to publicly reflect on their lives, their journeys, and the experiences that had shaped them. For many, this brought back memories that had long been buried moments of failure, disappointment, grief, loneliness, and struggles that were rarely spoken about. There were tears, long silences, and honest conversations. It was a reminder that behind every smile is a story that others may never know. The session created a space where vulnerability was not seen as weakness, but as courage, and the openness made for real bonding.

Growing up outside Kerala, our relationship with the church often felt like an inherited Sunday routine rather than a personal, living anchor. On a personal note, "Surrounded by the fast-paced life as a student in Ahmedabad, the gap between the ancient traditions of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church and my daily reality, often felt massive. The language barrier left the beautiful Malayalam liturgy feeling distant, and Sunday School sometimes felt more like an academic pursuit for certificates than a genuine pursuit of God.

While my connection with God started strong, the shift was gradual but painful. Between the relentless grind of final-year engineering assignments and the quiet, discouraging friction of local church politics, I found myself stepping back from serving at the altar. The guilt was a heavy, constant shadow. Deep down, I knew my reasons for stepping away were petty in the grand scheme of things, but when you are spiritually fatigued and overwhelmed by your daily responsibilities, finding the energy to simply show up feels impossible. Many of us arrived at COLT carrying this same silent exhaustion."

We were skeptical, spiritually drained, and carrying the unique isolating weight of being minority youth, trying to navigate a complex faith far from our roots. More than anything, COLT provided the incredibly rare gift of vulnerability. It is hard to find a truly safe space to voice our deepest doubts without the fear of judgment. We bonded over the shared experience of feeling distant from the clergy and unsure of who to trust with our questions. We won't forget Bibi Kochamma's session which ended by guiding us to close our eyes and take a quiet trek into the dark, bleeding corners of our own hearts. She helped us realize that searching within ourselves is a prayer in itself, showing us how to find the light of God residing in the spaces we had long neglected.

For many of us who were born and raised outside of Kerala, COLT offered a unique opportunity to learn, understand and experience the beauty, and the richness of the traditions and teachings of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church. Through sessions led by prominent teachers from our Church, we gained a deeper understanding of the Orthodox faith.

The sessions and discussions offered us valuable insights into the history of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, the struggles and sacrifices of our forefathers and the importance of preserving and carrying forward the faith that has been handed down to us through generations. The learning then

extended beyond classrooms and taught sessions, enabling us to transform our understanding of Orthodoxy from a mere set of beliefs into practicing and living the Orthodox way of life.

The pilgrimage and journey to visit historic sites and Churches that we had previously only heard about made this an experience of a lifetime. Visiting the place where the Synod of Diamper was held, to standing at the sacred place of the Coonan Cross, remembering but also taking an oath ourselves, it all brought the history of our Church to life. These moments allowed us to connect in our own personal ways with the events that shaped the identity and roots of our church. These experiences kindled a greater appreciation for the resilience and faithfulness of those who preserved the teachings and traditions of Orthodoxy in India. As members of the Diaspora, are we willing to uphold our faith? Are we ready to rise to the challenge of preserving, defending and faithfully passing on this precious heritage along with the teachings and traditions of our Church, to future generations?

The Holy Sacraments form a key cornerstone of our Church's teachings and traditions. In addition to deepening our understanding of the Holy Sacraments, the opportunity to partake of them was a meaningful and spiritually enriching experience. Commencing the camp on the Holy Feast of Pentecost with Holy Qurbana at the Old Seminary in Kottayam, was in itself a significant and symbolic moment that marked the beginning of our spiritual journey. Throughout the seven days, many of us were blessed with the opportunity to receive the Sacrament of Holy Confession, enabling us to experience firsthand the spiritual depth of our Church's sacred traditions, the boundless love and mercy of God, and the importance of nurturing and sustaining a personal relationship with Christ.

Perhaps the greatest lesson from COLT was that leadership begins with understanding people. The camp taught us that leadership is not about authority or recognition but about empathy, listening, teamwork, resilience, and service. We learned that every individual carries unique strengths, struggles, and perspectives, and that meaningful leadership starts when we genuinely care about those around us.

As the final day arrived, there was a shared feeling that the week had passed far too quickly. While everyone was excited to return home, there was also a sense of reluctance to leave behind the friendships, memories, and experiences that had become so meaningful.

COLT 2026 may have officially lasted seven days, but its impact extends far beyond those seven days. The lessons learned, the people we met, and the moments shared will continue to influence us long after the camp has ended. But that is the true genius of Fr. Philip Kuruvilla, Bibi Kochamma, his wife; Maria Chechi, his daughter, and the entire COLT team. They did not just give us a temporary retreat. They met us in our spiritual exhaustion, repaired and strengthened the foundations of our faith, and planted seeds of deep and enduring spirituality within us. Now, no matter where life takes us or how chaotic the world becomes, we have been given the tools to build and sustain our spirituality and nurture the church within our own hearts.

The motto of the camp was "THIS CAMP CAN CHANGE YOUR LIFE". It did - because for seven days we didn't just discuss creation, we stood within it. Barefoot, wind-blown, sun-drenched, rain-soaked, and finally, a little more human, and a lot closer to where Christ calls us to be on our journey to His kingdom.

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Co-authored by Jenet Chacko (Ahmedabad, India), Lisa George (Jharkhand, India), Lispeth Abraham (Bristol, UK), Herie David (Ahmedabad, India)

NEWS

Malankara Sabha to elect four new Bishops

Kottayam: The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church has decided to elect four new bishops. The decision, based on the recommendations of the Episcopal Synod and the Working Committee, was announced by His Holiness Baselios Marthoma Mathews III, Catholicos of the East and Malankara Metropolitan, at the Church Managing Committee meeting held at the Old Seminary, Kottayam. The Malankara Syrian Christian Association, empowered to elect bishops, is scheduled to be convened on August 27 at Mulamthuruthy. The occasion also coincides with the 150th anniversary of the Mulanthuruthy Synod and the episcopal consecration of Saint Gregorios of Parumala. The Church Managing Committee will meet at 10 a.m. on August 27th at the Marthoman Church, Mulamthuruthy, after which the Catholicos and other dignitaries will be accorded a formal welcome and escorted to Mar Gregorios Nagar at Vettickal St. Thomas Dayara, the venue of the Association meeting. Around 4,000 elected representatives of the Malankara Church from across the world are expected to participate in the election process through a ballot.

The event also marks the 150th anniversary of the first-ever Association meeting of the Malankara Church, held at Vettickal Dayara, a historic spiritual centre associated with the life and legacy of St. Gregorios of Parumala. This will be the first episcopal election in four years, following the last election held in 2022. The Malankara Syrian Christian Association meeting held at Kolenchery in 2022 elected seven bishops.

His Holiness Baselios Marthoma Mathews III Catholicos expresses condolences over Mundathikode fireworks tragedy

Kottayam: The fireworks accident at Mundathikode in Thrissur is heartbreaking, said the head of the Malankara Church, His Holiness Catholicos Baselios Marthoma Mathews III. His Holiness observed that while precautions are introduced after every disaster to prevent similar incidents, the Mundathikode tragedy demonstrates that such measures are often sustained only until the next accident takes place."

H.H. urged that we should act wisely to ensure that such tragic incidents do not occur again during festivals, feasts, and other celebrations. H.H. reminded everyone to honestly reflect on whether innocent human lives should be sacrificed for the momentary pleasure of having fireworks.

It is not orders or laws, but the awakening of the human conscience that should motivate us to avoid extravagance. All religions should make wise decisions in this matter. We must realize that saints and the holy ones are pleased not by fireworks but by the purity of the believer's heart. The Malankara Churches should be simple and moderate in their celebrations. God delights not in excessive festivities but in love and compassion shown toward others. We should not forget that wars taking place elsewhere have reached even our kitchens. When spending money unnecessarily, we should not ignore the economic crises that lies ahead, the Catholicos added.

His Holiness called upon everyone to join hands in using the money spent on celebrations

for the welfare of brothers and sisters facing financial hardship. The possibility of building a house using the money set aside from one year's festivals and celebrations should be explored.

If such a decision, which becomes a light to the world, can be made, that would be the greatest joy. The Malankara Church will stand in support with such noble efforts. His Holiness also stated that he would personally participate in a joyful occasion at any one of the first five churches to take such a decision.

Malankara Church Leadership Meets the Chief Minister

Thiruvananthapuram: The leaders of the Malankara Orthodox Church met Chief Minister V.D. Satheesan. A delegation comprising Dr. Yuhanon Mar Chrysostomos Metropolitan, Secretary of the Holy Episcopal Synod; Dr. Yuhanon Mar Diascoros Metropolitan, Head of the Church Media Department; Priest Trustee Fr. Dr. Thomas Varghese Amayil; Lay Trustee Rony Varghese Abraham; Association Secretary Adv. Biju Ommen; and Fr. Geevarghese Johnson, Assistant Principal Secretary to His Holiness the Catholicos, visited the newly elected Chief Minister at the Legislative Assembly and conveyed the greetings of His Holiness and the Malankara Sabha.

The Church leadership also met and conveyed greetings to Thiruvanchoor Radhakrishnan, who was elected Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, and Home Minister Ramesh Chennithala. They wished the new government success in leading Kerala on the path of development while embracing people from all sections of society. The Church leadership observed that the policies announced by the government after assuming office are encouraging. They also noted that initiatives such as the Department for Senior Citizens are particularly relevant in a time of increasing migration.

The Roots of the Drug Network Must Be Eradicated: Malankara Church Supports Government's Operation Toofan

Kottayam: The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church has pledged its full support to Operation Toofan, the mission launched by the state government to protect Kerala society from the growing menace of drug abuse. Following the announcement of the mission, numerous raids in various districts across Kerala have been reported.

Foreign nationals are among those being arrested while drug traffickers are also being apprehended in coordination with Inter-State Police forces. The increasing volume of narcotics flowing into the state is a matter of serious concern. The Home Minister, Mr. Ramesh Chennithala, has firmly stated that the source of this menace will be identified and eliminated. Even before assuming office as Home Minister, he had undertaken a statewide awareness campaign against drug abuse through his Kerala Yatra. It was only after directly witnessing the dangerous situation in the state, that he and the government initiated this historic mission.

The formation of the Toofan Intelligence Team to collect information on the drug mafia will be beneficial to the public. The Malankara Church is also joining the fight against this social menace. Anti-drug awareness programmes will be organized in the Church's parishes and educational institutions.

Dr. Yuhanon Mar Dioscoros Metropolitan,

Head of the Media Department of the Church, stated that it is the need of the hour for the entire Kerala society to stand united with Operation Toofan for the sake of our future generations.

Global Clergy Conference at Parumala

PARUMALA, KERALA — Over 1,000 Orthodox priests from India and various global dioceses gathered at the historic Parumala Seminary in Kerala, India, from May 19 to 21, 2026, for the Global Clergy Conference, hosted by the St. Thomas Orthodox Vaidika Sangham (STOVS). This landmark event centred on the timely theme, "Priest: Guardian of the Apostolic Flame in a Changing World," which emphasized the vocation of preserving and faithfully transmitting the apostolic faith through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Held every three years, the conference provided a sacred space for collective prayer, theological reflection, pastoral formation, and priestly fellowship. It served as a renewed affirmation of the sacred vocation of Orthodox priesthood in today's world.

The inaugural session was presided over by H.G. Dr. Mathews Mar Thimothios, President of STOVS, and the Conference was officially inaugurated by His Holiness Baselios Marthoma Mathews III, Catholicos of the East and Malankara Metropolitan. In his inaugural address, His Holiness emphasized the sacred responsibility of the clergy to preserve the Apostolic faith with fidelity, humility, and spiritual courage. He called upon every priest to remain firmly rooted in Christ while responding wisely to the rapidly changing realities of the modern world, becoming a beacon of hope for the faithful.

The keynote address was delivered by Dr. Roshan Jacob, IAS, who reflected on the indispensable role of the priest in contemporary society. She highlighted that the Church continues to be a source of moral guidance, compassion, integrity, and comfort, and encouraged the clergy to remain authentic witnesses of Christ through holiness of life, dedicated service, and pastoral sensitivity.

A key highlight of the inaugural session was the launch of two pastoral initiatives:

Reignite: A program for the spiritual renewal of clergy, strengthening the interior life of priests through structured prayer, reflection, and ongoing formation.

Light to Lighten: 'A holistic personality and life-skills development initiative' aimed at enhancing pastoral leadership and parish ministry effectiveness.

On the same occasion, the Clergy Directory and the Conference Theme Booklet were formally released.

A significant blessing of the conference was the active presence of the majority of the Metropolitans of the Holy Episcopal Synod. Over the three days, eminent bishops, theologians, educators, and professionals led insightful sessions addressing key dimensions of contemporary priestly ministry. The conference gave a powerful message to the clergy to remain faithful guardians of tradition while becoming joyful witnesses of Christ in a changing world.

The Pithru-vandhanam ceremony, 'honoring retired clergy' for their faithful and lifelong service to the Church was a significant programme.

In his final exhortation, His Holiness Baselios Marthoma Mathews III urged all clergy to return to their ministries with renewed courage, pastoral love, and unwavering commitment to preserving the Apostolic flame.

The conference concluded with a vote

of thanks delivered by Rev. Fr. Dr. Ninan V. George, General Secretary of STOVS. The Triennial Global Clergy Conference 2026 once again revealed the spiritual vitality, structural strength, and profound unity of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian priesthood.

Seminar on 'War and the Future of Humanity'

War, which inflicts severe damage on humanity and the economy, is an abuse of political power, said Fr. Dr. K. M. George, Chairperson of the Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios Chair at Mahatma Gandhi University. He added that, against the backdrop of global conflicts increasingly affecting the daily lives of ordinary people, individuals from all walks of life should be able to proclaim the Gospel of peace. He was inaugurating and addressing a seminar on the topic "War and the Future of Humanity" held at the Orthodox Theological Seminary on 12 June.

The seminar was presided over by the Principal, Fr. Dr. John Thomas Karingattil. Dr. Cherian Eapen, Chairman of the Roy International Foundation, delivered the keynote address. The Bursar of the Seminary Fr. Dr. Ninan K. George and Fr. Dr. Bijesh Philip also addressed the gathering.

"Saukhyan" and "Karuthal" schemes by the Ministry of Human Empowerment

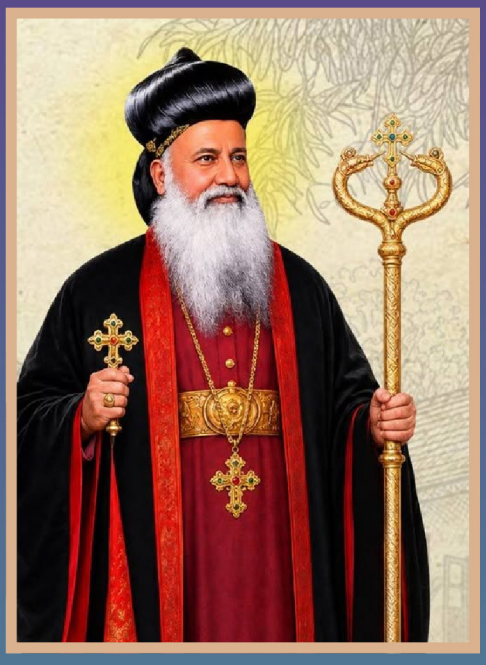
Many welfare initiatives are being formulated and implemented from time to time under the leadership of the Church Human Empowerment Department (Ministry of Human Empowerment). Two new initiatives, Saukhyan and Karuthal, launched last year, were introduced to all through the Kalpana of His Holiness the Catholicos.

1. 'Saukhyan' Scheme: The Saukhyan scheme aims to provide proper medical guidance to Church members and others suffering from various illnesses, as well as to provide guidance to those preparing for treatment by offering expert advice and second opinions. At present, many patients face various forms of exploitation in the medical field. Unnecessary tests, scans, and surgeries are sometimes prescribed by doctors, particularly in the corporate healthcare sector. Proper and timely medical guidance can greatly support patients, especially those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Eminent doctors are extending their support and expertise for this initiative.

2. 'Karuthal' Scheme: The new academic year has begun. The Central and State governments provide various benefits, including scholarships and grants, to minority students. However, very often such scholarships / grants remain unutilized and lapse due to delays in submitting Applications. It is unfortunate that our children lose these benefits because of a lack of timely awareness and action.

The Minority Sections need to sensitize the people of each parish. Awareness classes in this regard will be arranged under the leadership of the Human Empowerment ministry. Such classes can be arranged at convenient times in the parishes by contacting Rev Fr Benjamin Sankarathil. (Mob. No. +919446043247)

Memorial Feast of



SABHA THEJAS H. H. JOSEPH
MAR DIONYSIUS V

H.H. BASELIOS
MARTHOMA PAULOSE II

Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.
Hebrews 13:7